PLACES FOR CHILDREN – CHILDREN'S PLACES

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In their everyday lives, children largely stay within and relate to three settings – their homes, schools and recreational institutions. These environments have been created by adults and designated by them as 'places for children'. A more differentiated picture of children's spatial culture emerges when children discuss and take photographs of settings that are meaningful to them. This article applies the concept 'children's places' to explain the fact that children relate not only to official places provided by adults, but also to informal places, often unnoticed by adults. The analysis sheds light on interfaces and discontinuities between 'places for children' and 'children's places' and argues that the concept should not be underestimated in the sociology of childhood.

The everyday life of children takes place in concrete, physical spaces. Children's everyday life flows along because children live their lives in a stream of time that glides along as they find other places. Time and place are central categories in conceptualizing the transient, ordinary nature of everyday life. Social relations and cultural context are also important, although in this article the concept of place, in particular of 'children's places', is in the foreground of the analysis, while time, social relationships and wider cultural and social contexts are set in the background.

The article builds on and incorporates material from two projects: 'Children's Institutionalized Childhood and Everyday Life' (Rasmussen and Smidt, 2002) and 'Neighbourhood Structure, Urban Quality and Children's Everyday Life' (Agervig Jensen and Jørgensen, 2001).[1] The first project was designed to gain insight into the ways in which children experience institutionalized childhood and everyday life in the Danish welfare state. Eighty-eight informants, 5–12 years of age, took part in the project. They came from 13 different locations in Denmark (north, south, east and west; city, suburbs, provincial town and countryside). During one week in 1998–9, children used disposable cameras to take photographs of places meaningful to them. Some of the photographs, which showed any number of places and

persons, are reproduced here. The second project was formulated to gain insight into the everyday lives of children in four neighbourhoods, with a view to calling attention to the significance and impact of physical surroundings on everyday life. Sixty child informants took part in the project, where walking interviews were used as a tool for collecting information in neighbourhoods. The informants showed researchers around, pointed out places, buildings and routes, and told about events, play and their experiences of everyday life.

Time and place in the everyday life of children

The general pattern of everyday life for Danish children between 6 and 10 years old brings them to large institutionalized locations: private homes, schools and recreational institutions. Each of these settings may be regarded as large 'places for children' made by adults. Data from empirical research projects show there is a strong relationship between these places and the time regimes that structure the everyday life of Danish children. Their time/place rhythm can be described as follows. Children wake up at home between 6.30 and 7.30 in the morning. They wash, brush their teeth and dress, eat breakfast, and watch a little morning television. At about 8.00, children walk or cycle to school or are accompanied or driven there by parents. At school, they are subject to the school's general organization of time and place until about 1 or 2 p.m., when they go to youth recreation centres or clubs or to after-school programmes. These places have 'services' for children and direct where and how they may spend their time. Between about 3 and 5 o'clock, children are taken home by their parents or they walk or cycle home on their own. Children stay inside or play outside until dinnertime. Then there are also those children who go to various leisure-time activities at certain places at certain times on certain days: music, boy scouts or girl guides, riding, or different sports activities such as football, handball, swimming and the like. Before children go to bed between 8 and 9 o'clock, as a rule they have also managed to watch television, listen to music on their own equipment, amuse themselves on a play station or at a computer, perhaps do some homework, play with brothers, sisters, friends, or pet animals, and talk a little with their parents. This everyday life appears natural to children. It is experienced as a matter of course even though the sociology and history of childhood tells us that the everyday life of children and its conditions are a social, historical and cultural construct (James et al., 1998; Mayall, 2002; Qvortrup, 1994). Historical and sociological studies also make clear that in the not so distant past childhood was experienced quite differently; that may also be the case in other contemporary Danish settings (and elsewhere in the world).

Discussing the pulse of time in the everyday life of children takes us to the concept 'places for children'. They can be described as the corners of the

'institutionalized triangle' that circumscribes daily life in the Danish welfare state, where Helga Zeiher argues 'urban islands' define a child's life (Zeiher, 2003). In this article, the home arena is taken to comprise one corner of the institutional triangle and the route to school constitutes one leg. The school arena marks the second corner, and the route from school to the recreational facility is the second leg. The recreational facility is at the third corner, and the route from this place to home is the last leg. To a great extent, children's everyday life is staged in these arenas, although children also spend time in places where other activities like those mentioned earlier take place, i.e. sports, consumption, the media and so forth.

The settings just mentioned, especially schools and recreational facilities, are to a high degree designed and designated by adults as 'places for children'. The places are institutionalized to the extent that architects and planners intend them to be 'special' places for children; children spend an increasing amount of time in them (judged over the course of the past 20–30 years); they put children in contact with 'professional' adults – the pedagogues, social workers, teachers and psychologists who staff these institutions.

But how do children experience everyday life in the places where they spend so much time? What do 'children's places' look like when children present their everyday lives in photographs and stories? In the following case studies, child informants use photographs and stories to express themselves in a concrete, down-to-earth manner. We see and hear them point out examples of key outdoor places in 'the institutionalized triangle'. Children's places also exist indoors and on the routes between the arenas mentioned and other areas in neighbourhoods. However, consideration of these spaces is beyond the scope of this article.

The earth: 'Bumleby,' an example of a 'children's place'

Anders is an 8-year-old boy who lives in a small village that consists of a few well-established farms and houses. As a form of settlement, the village dates to the time when Denmark was an agricultural society where most people lived in the countryside and children grew up under agrarian conditions. Today, when terms such as postmodernity, reflexive modernity and the information society are commonly used to explain society and diagnose its problems, it is useful to remember that contemporary children continue to grow up in conditions that retain some similarity with the past.

Some of Anders' photographs from the home arena were taken around the place in this photo (Figure 1).[2] Anders has this to say about his photograph:

> This is Bumleby. A town that Karl and I are making. There are roads and fields of corn. . . . We each have a house. . . . Karl's house was there (he points to the middle of the picture). And that was my house (points), but Karl got it. There

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Figure 1 'Bumleby,' a child's place, located on a Danish island. This photograph was taken by 'Anders', an 8-year-old boy

> was also a house up there. The house he built was really nice. It was this high (shows with outstretched hand – about half a metre) but it fell down in the rain. . . . It was only made of mud.

We hear about a special place, a place created by Anders and Karl. I have to admit that as an adult coming from outside this community, I cannot see what Anders 'sees', namely 'Bumleby'. On the other hand, I have no difficulty getting caught up in his story. It is not hard to imagine that this piece of land would appeal to children's creativity and game playing; that it established and continues to provide a framework for planning roads, building houses and excavation. One senses from Anders' stories that the place is animated. This is apparent because Anders uses a special name when describing this place; its importance also emerges from the story that Anders elicits from the photo.

'Bumleby' is a result of children's symbolic work and creativity (Willis, 1990, 2000). In the context of this article, this setting provides a thought-provoking illustration of what I call a 'children's place'. In the case of 'Bumleby', a children's place is a piece of ground to which boys attribute meaning through playing games and building on a specific plot of land. The place is quite alive in Anders' world even though rain has washed away most of the town that he and his friends made.

Why is this seemingly random plot of ground a 'children's place'? As I just mentioned, Anders and his friends have attributed special meaning and identity to it, which is clear from the name, 'Bumleby'. The place also

invites bodily action and fulfils the boys' need for exertion and building games. The boys were not playing there when they described it to me, but earlier experiences seem to be living (alive) in their narration. An analytical concept that helps explains its significance is genius loci, mentioned in the literature about places (Nordberg-Schultz, 1985). Nordberg-Schultz uses this concept to refer to sensations and interpretations that are linked to specific places. He argues that sensory impressions help communicate the experience of a place having a 'genius' – a spirit or soul. These sensations are not always verbally accessible, and they are often difficult or even impossible to communicate to others. However, when a photograph like that of Bumleby becomes the subject of a narration, it can contribute to explaining something of what is unique about the place, even though feelings, atmosphere and spirit are difficult to visualize.

In connection with the story about Bumleby, it should be mentioned that Karl, Anders' best friend, is 15 years old and in eighth grade. One does not very often hear about childhood friends who are 8 and 15, respectively, but Anders indicates he has been playing with Karl since he (Anders) was quite small. Later on, Anders reports that they are, in fact, the only boys in the village. Although not said aloud, one understands that the alternative to not playing together would be to have nobody to play with, when one comes home, after school. This information does not really change our perception of Bumleby as a 'children's place', but it draws attention to the conditions for children's play and everyday life in contemporary rural areas. It is part of the fate of modern childhood in Denmark that when one lives in a rural area there may be only a few children to play with, but in relatively large spaces! This contrasts with conditions in many urban areas: there are many children to play with, but rather little space to use. Let us move into an urban neighbourhood, developed at the time when migration from the countryside contributed to the growth of the city.

The courtyard: a frame for 'places for children' and 'children's own places'

For children living in an older urban neighbourhood, typically filled with closed blocks of flats built around 1900, the courtyard comprises a key part of the 'home arena'. Line, a 7-year-old girl living in such a neighbourhood in Copenhagen has taken this photograph of 'the courtyard' (Figure 2). This is what she says about it:

> *Line:* This is my courtyard. There's someone called Lena and that one is called Tanja. We have some swings over there, and one of them keeps on breaking because they twist around on it. Here's the clothesline and this is the best tree for climbing. But Åge who lives there (points to the side of the picture) will NOT let us climb it. He comes out with a pipe in his mouth and says: 'You are not allowed to climb up there!'

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Figure 2 This is Line's photograph of her courtyard with a climbing tree and clotheslines. 'Line' was 7 years old, when she took this photograph

> *Interviewer:* Are you not allowed to climb any of the trees?
> *Line:* No.
> *Interviewer:* But you do it just the same?
> *Line:* Yes, when he has left we hop up again. And this is our sandbox and there's our slide.
> *Interviewer:* Are there any dangerous places in the courtyard?'
> *Line:* Yes, that green bit there . . . this is where we climb up. There's a bit that goes down to a whole lot of electricity. But we climb out there all the same when he has left.

Line's description of this meaningful place, 'my courtyard', indicates it is a key part of her home arena. It is also an example of the distinctive spaces that establish the corners of the institutionalized triangle for Danish children. Even though the home arena is usually associated with housing of some sort, it cannot be reduced to a dwelling per se (an apartment in Line's case). Rather, the home arena includes indoor and outdoor spaces. For instance, when children at school refer to their play 'at home', they are thinking about indoor and outdoor play. In a Swedish study concerning children, dwellings and city, the environmental psychologist Maria Nordström points out that

smaller children construe 'home' to be the place where one is and where one plays; at age 12 or 13, they start to regard 'home' as an indoor space (Nordström, 1996).

On the basis of Line's account, one gets the impression that the courtyard is experienced as a world; that is, as a large place that consists of children, adults, animals, special places and important things. Line, for example, mentions that her courtyard contains swings, a slide, a sandbox, clotheslines; a close examination of her picture shows that the courtyard also contains an enclosed basketball post with a basketball net. In other words, the courtyard contains playthings made by adults and put there for the children, making it, in part, a 'place for children'. Line also draws attention to a couple of other places: 'the best tree for climbing', which the children are not allowed to climb, and a green box over some electricity cables, where children climb when Åge, the caretaker, is not looking. The last two spaces are places that children take to be very important, at the same as using them gives rise to conflict between children and adults.

In the context of Line's courtyard, the tree cannot really be regarded as a 'place for children' when it is contrasted to the sandbox and the slide, designed by adults for children (Grau and Walsh, 1998). Rather, the tree is an example of a 'children's place', that is, a special place that some children deem important, in this case a young girl. Like the 'Bumleby', the tree is a place where children come together physically (use of place); it is a place where children have had special experiences (embedded as knowledge of place); it is a place to which special meaning is attributed ('best tree for climbing'); and finally, it is a place that arouses certain feelings (feeling of place). Roger Hart has pointed out that to a child (and probably also to an adult), researchers' analyses bring to light the importance of various aspects of place, for instance the use of place, the knowledge of place and feeling of place. There is a certain irony to the consequences of this process. In the subject's understanding, these aspects of space were integrated, not separated (Hart, 1979: 12), although the researcher's analysis contributes to the disintegration of what is connected and integrated in a child's phenomenological experience.

The sandbox, the slide and the tree must be regarded as concrete examples of 'children's places'. Once again, this concept draws attention to the relation between places adults create for children and places that children find important and meaningful. Sometimes, 'places for children' and 'children's places' are identical. However, studies of the everyday life of children uncover many examples of children relating to places ('children's places') in their neighbourhoods that are not identical with 'places for children'. They include chalk drawings on sidewalks, goal posts between two bushes, a hole in a wire fence that offers a shortcut to a lawn, and so forth. This shows that children and their bodies tacitly point out that they need different places than those adults create for them. Hugh Matthews, for example, has shown that

separate playrooms, typically created by adults for children, do not meet children's needs (Matthews, 1992: 221). Lasse, a 12-year-old boy, offers a similar criticism. Like Line, Lasse lives in a neighbourhood with closed blocks of flats and has photographed his courtyard where the fenced-in area for playing ball takes up lots of space:

> *Lasse:* This is a picture of my courtyard . . . that's the outside. Here at the back is a playground.
> *Interviewer:* What do you use the courtyard for?
> *Lasse:* To play with my younger brother. We do that very often . . . Over there I play football with my brother . . . and behind that there's a sort of swing and a playhouse, and that's where I swing together with him and play football and all sorts of fun things.
> *Interviewer:* Is the courtyard good?
> *Lasse:* No, it's not specially good. There's something missing.
> *Interviewer:* What do you think is missing?
> *Lasse:* What's missing is basketball nets. You can see that the boards are there but no nets have been put up.
> *Interviewer:* Why?
> *Lasse:* Well, they just haven't got around to it yet. They're so lazy.
> *Interviewer:* Is anything else missing?
> *Lasse:* There should be more things to play with . . . specially for the small kids – shouldn't there? A slide.
> *Interviewer:* Is there nothing for the small children?
> *Lasse:* Well, there's a small sandbox and a swing. But that's not very much. Not when you think of how many small kids there are here in the courtyard.

Adults have made places for children in this courtyard, but as Lasse points out, the courtyard does not meet their needs. He is an excellent ambassador for small children. This situation (and his analysis of it) leads one to favour children becoming actively involved in planning and design whenever courtyards and other key places for children are renovated or modernized. As we have seen, children possess vital knowledge, and their involvement and participation is eminently possible (see Chawla, 2002; Driskell, 2002; Hart, 2002). Indeed, as observers of children's play have noted, children integrate planning, construction and so in informal play. However, 'children's places' are often less conspicuous than 'places for children', and adults perceive them from a different perspective than children do, seeing them as an examples of disorder, mess, destruction and prohibited behaviour (as in Line and the tree).

The garden: another frame for 'places for children' and 'children's places'

Nine-year-old Nanna does not live in a neighbourhood with closed blocks of flats and a courtyard. She lives in a suburban residential neighbourhood, built in the 1950s, which represents an alternative approach to urban development from blocks of flats with enclosed courtyards. In her home arena, the

Figure 3 Nanna's swing. 'Nanna' was 8 years old when she took this photograph

garden – the green garden space and various sites in it – plays a key role in her daily life. She has taken a number of photographs of her garden, which indicate that she likes the setting very much and relates to many places in her garden, rather than having one favourite spot or a select few. The first picture is of her rabbit, which she has had for two years. She says that she often plays with the animal and lets it out on a run, weather permitting. The photograph of her rabbit prompts another comment: 'You can play with it. If you show it a leaf of lettuce and hide it, then the rabbit is able to find it.' Another photograph shows a small tent elsewhere in the garden. The tent belongs to her younger brother, but Nanna and her three siblings play in it. 'We . . . slept there one day. I can't remember if it was the day I took the picture', she says. She also has taken some pictures of her mother's birthday, which show the family and guests sitting in the garden. Nanna says that her family often holds birthday parties in the garden and that she thinks it is fun. Nanna also has a couple of pictures of the swing: one shows her sister standing on the swing, and one shows the swing itself (Figure 3).

When asked why she took photographs of the swing, Nanna states: 'I don't know, – yes, I do. It was because I wanted to . . . take a picture of where I was mostly out in the garden.' This answer indicates the significance of the garden to her and the importance of having a special place to a 9-year-old girl. It is no coincidence that the swing is one of the places where she spends the most time, because swings are frequently the locus of a world of physical activity, imagination, songs and dreams for children. Nanna's pic-

ture indicates clearly that this particular place is frequently used: the grass has been worn away.

Nanna has also taken a photograph of a sandbox and a piece of earth she calls 'my siblings' and 'my garden where we have tomatoes every year'. When asked if she been in the neighbour's garden, she answers: 'Yes, sometimes – when we've kicked the ball in there.' She says that the neighbours have children, 'but they're much older than us', so she and her siblings do not play with them. Finally, Nanna has taken a few photographs of her family eating lunch on the garden terrace: 'I think that's nice', she says, and then explains: 'Because when the weather is good it's nicer to sit outside than inside.'

These accounts should remove any lingering doubts that the garden has great significance for Nanna. Typically, Nanna's accounts feature stories about the places in the garden that are organized as 'places for children', as is the case for almost all children who live in a suburban neighbourhood. Swings, the sandbox, a child's tomato garden and the rabbit run are some of the settings that she emphasizes. The many places that have been set up for children in this garden may have been provided because children asked for them. Perhaps, they were individually designed according to children's needs. As Nanna's account suggests, a congruence between 'places for children' and 'children's places' is possible, rather than only discontinuity.

Children who live in urban neighbourhoods with blocks of flats have a common courtyard with a common playground, but children from suburban residential neighbourhoods have individually designed 'playgrounds' in their back gardens. These spaces would comprise a very large area if they were 'lifted' out of the gardens of a residential district and laid together, side by side. However, they do not resemble official public playgrounds, because they are integrated in private lots and have a more individual stamp, even though materials and playthings often bear the mark of commercial standards and designs. Children from urban neighbourhoods often relate to the courtyard as a part of the home arena and a common place where they can gather together, play with each other, and have other activities; they are oriented to each other through their courtyards. In suburban residential neighbourhoods, individual gardens become key areas and spaces for children living in these areas.

Up to now, the presentation of children's photographs and accounts has followed a logical direction, from rural to urban to garden-city areas. This logic follows the history of (Danish) urbanization, a history that corresponds to central features in the history of childhood. Some of the large-scale changes in children's lives and childhood in the 19th and 20th centuries can be depicted by means of the history of urbanization, first from countryside to city, later from blocks of flats to residential neighbourhoods, and later again from individualized residential conditions to dense, low building and new communities. Changes in the history of childhood can also

be described as the history of institutionalization, which has culminated in institutionalized everyday life for children in the Danish welfare state. Schools, recreational institutions and institutionalized spare time are spread out and accommodated in a series of formal 'places for children'.

Is there space for 'children's places' in such pedagogical and adult-supervised arenas? What do children have to say about these settings? Before seeing and hearing some examples from schools and recreational institutions, the concept of 'children's places' must be elaborated and illustrated more specifically than I have done so far.

Concerning the concept 'children's places'

The concept 'children's places' is the child researcher's generalized term for places that children relate to, point out and talk about. While children actively use the word 'place', they usually do not talk about 'children's places'. Most often, their bodies show and tell where and what these are. The term may not be particularly precise, but the concept is intended to help adults become more attentive and responsive to places that engage children, physically and emotionally and encourage educators and teachers to scrutinize their own institutional settings and expand their understanding of 'children's places'.

What are some general features of the concept 'place'? Some geographers contrast the concept of 'place' with the concept of 'space'. Edward Relph, for example, defines space as distance stretching out in all directions (all three dimensions); he takes place to be a more specific, recognizable part of space. Place refers to a special, more delimited setting than space, a space with specific meanings and attributes. Relph also draws from phenomenological arguments to define place as that which human consciousness experiences as having meaning and that which causes a given physical locality to take on existence and character (Relph, 1976). Similarly, Yi-Fu Tuan emphasizes that space is more abstract than place and that what begins in experience as an undifferentiated space becomes a place, as one gradually experiences a setting, comes to know it better through lived experiences and attributes certain meanings to it (Tuan, 1977).

Given these definitions, it should come as no surprise that 'children's places' are located mainly in and around the areas where children live. These places can best be identified by means of empirical examples, as we have seen and heard from the photographs and stories about 'Bumleby', 'my courtyard'/the tree and 'my garden'/the swing. A key difference between 'children's places' and 'places for children' is that while adults can point out and identify 'places for children', to begin with only children can show and tell about 'children's places'. A place, including 'places for children', becomes a 'children's place' after a child connects with it physically.

Physical sensation allows a place to be encoded with meaning as special emotions arise, knowledge of place is generated and so forth.

What more can we learn from the term 'children's places'? It localizes and makes concrete interfaces and discontinuities between places adults have thought up, designed and organized for children and places that children take over and use themselves. One could say that while 'places for children' display adults' ideas about children (toys, fences, etc.), 'children's places' make clear that children develop meaningful relationships to other places. This assessment takes place on the basis of what children tell, show and do themselves (the strategy used in this article). The concept of 'children's places' is also closely related to the idea of children as actors and co-creators of their lives (James et al., 1998; Christensen and James, 2000) and creates respect for the attribution of meaning by children to the specific sites that they pick out, use, create and define. Finally, the concept helps adults reflect about daily life in a welfare society, where children's lives and childhood are marked by 'the institutionalized triangle'. Is there any place and justification for 'children's places' outside the 'places for children'? Primarily, I am thinking about institutions for young children and schools, where in the Danish context children spend more and more time fenced in, monitored, risk-assessed and pedagogically employed.

This discussion about 'children's places' may sound as if an individual child is able to decide the places to which he or she relates. However, we know that a child's daily life is often far more complicated than that. As Roger Hart has argued, social context is necessarily incorporated in the development of consciousness although, as Hart recognizes, a meaning linked to an object or a place does not arise from social interaction alone. Many studies tell us that there are many places in children's local environments that have a (subjective) significance known to only one child and this insight is confirmed by both of the empirical research projects, from which this article draws. Children's places are created in different contexts, shaped in some instances for decidedly social reasons and in others for more individually determined purposes. It must also be emphasized that 'children's places' do not last forever; sometimes the relationship ceases, after a short period (as in hopscotch grids or chalk drawings) and in other situations the relationship can last for years. Local weather conditions and time of year (the seasons) also play a role, although the influences are not elaborated here.

The school playground: a place for children and also for children's places

Following these reflections on concepts of space and place, we turn to the school arena. Earlier I described the school as 'the second corner' in the institutionalized triangle of a child's everyday life. As we have seen, the

Figure 4 Anja's view of a paved playground in a Danish city. 'Anja' took this picture when she was 12 years old

design of the places for children in the home arena varies, depending on the kind of neighbourhood where children live. In contrast to the home arena, the form of schools is more independent of the type of neighbourhood where they are situated, even though schools also differ from each other in appearance, due to having been built in different historical periods. Since most children in the research project attend schools that are traditional in design, this discussion takes as a point of departure photographs of a typical multi-storey large brick school, rather than other examples.

Like many other children in this study, Anja, who is 12 years old, has taken several photographs of her school, including pictures of her school's playground. The foreground of one of her playground photographs, taken from within the space, shows a table, a bench and a boy. A wooden building, about 3 m high and designed for the games of smaller children, is in the background. Anja relates the following about one of the other playground pictures (Figure 4), taken from a bird's-eye perspective:

> I took this one from the classroom [second floor]. That's because we have also been allowed to have a playground [i.e. an extra, small playground as well as the big one]. Our playground is not very big and that's why we were allowed to get it.

The photograph shows the typical condition of Danish school playgrounds: the entire surface is paved with cement/asphalt. High fences and walls surround the play space, which contains some rudimentary playthings and a goal that can be used for playing ball. With few variations, these motifs

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appear, again and again, in children's photographs of playgrounds. The uniformity of the school playground environment is striking, more striking than uniformity of 'places for children' found in home arenas. Do children have a particular view of this situation? Is there some tacit discourse concerning children in the school playground environment?

On the basis of Anja's photographs (and those of many other children), it is clear that children usually do not demarcate places in playgrounds as special or important to them. The majority of photographs and stories tell us that in the school arena, most children primarily relate to their schoolmates and teachers. Still, there are some children who have shown with photographs and told in stories that they relate to special settings or objects on the school playground – certain playthings, the school caretaker's cellar, or a bird's nest in the bushes outside the fence around the school. Moreover, when children use means other than photographs to describe the built environment, they highlight aspects of the school environment that are important to them, physically and emotionally.

In 'walking interviews', as children showed researchers around they described and pointed out the places, routes and happenings of everyday life, including school. Some schoolchildren said that they usually parked their bicycles in the same spot in the bicycle stand; that is, they attributed meaning to a specific place – 'my place for my bike'. Others told about places in the school playground that proved appealing for specific games. More thought provoking, however, is that children indicate adult assumptions about school playgrounds are misguided, especially that children see a playground as a large 'place for children'. To a certain extent, the school playground is a 'place for children', but nonetheless adults have divided it up into different areas and zones. While showing me around the school area, children told me: 'The small children are not allowed to go over there.' 'We're not allowed to be here.' 'We are not allowed to go into the bushes, but we do it all the same when the teacher on playground duty is not looking.'

With this point in mind, one cannot say that there are no 'children's places' in the school playground. Still, children are often corrected or scolded when they seek out these places, the ones that are meaningful to them. Anja touches on this theme when she says although she generally likes going to school, some teachers are too strict: 'I don't like my history teacher, she's too tough. She gets annoyed if you only make one mistake. Then she's irritable and you can't go near her the rest of the day', after which she makes an association to the term 'scold', and says: 'The small children often climb up on the fence behind the football thing . . . then they are also scolded.'

Not all places in a school playground seem to be legitimate places for children to inhabit. As this account shows, an environment made for children may allow children to establish interfaces between 'children's places' and 'places for children'.

The ball court: a place for children at the recreational facility

We have now reached the third corner of the institutionalized triangle, and historically speaking, the most recent addition to children's everyday life in the Danish welfare state. Youth recreation centres or clubs are a common part of a child's everyday life and another example of 'places for children'. Younger school children, 6–10 years old, usually spend 2–3 hours a day in these institutions, after school. Another after-school programme, known as the School Leisure-Time Scheme (SFO), is situated at schools and is used by a number of Danish children. Unlike youth recreation centres or clubs, the outdoor environment of the SFO does not differ from the school setting, so it is not discussed here.

The youth recreation centre/club comprises the framework of 'para-doxical leisure-time', a time that is after the authorized school hours but before the children come home. This time is paradoxical in the sense that if one asks a child whether she or he attends the centre/club each day, the answer may be: 'Not every day – sometimes I take the day off and stay at home in my courtyard and play and do all sorts of other things' (Rasmussen and Smidt, 2002: 85). That children today can talk meaningfully about 'taking the day off' from a youth recreation centre or club is a striking expression of one of the paradoxes of institutionalized childhood. When 'free time' is spent in an institutional context, it is not experienced as quite free. That may also be one reason why children say that the institutions are boring, after their 9th or 10th birthdays. They prefer to be at home even if their parents are still at work.

The outdoor environments of recreational institutions usually show greater variation and fantasy and not as much uniformity as school playgrounds. Even so, recreational institutions share a number of common features with schools. They are collective, without any real privacy. In bad weather, many children gather together in a relatively small indoor space, where the noise level can be high. To a greater or lesser extent, professionals supervise them. Outdoors they are fenced in and use for play a relatively large area, paved with flagstones/asphalt. A number of fixed objects, such as sandboxes, playhouses and swings, are available for play, although children also have at their disposal a great number of mobile toys: roller skates, bicycles, moon cars and the like. Some centres have animals (rabbits, chickens, etc.), and some have a place for a bonfire, where a fire is regularly lit, special breads are baked and so forth. The recreation centres also often contain climbing frames, climbing trees and other things for physical activity. Such places are highly valued by children because, when they tell about the places they most like to be, they often select places that are 'up', for example up in a certain tree or a certain climbing frame, on a certain hill or a rampart. Agnes Heller also points out that what is 'up' in everyday life very often has 'high value' attributed to it (Heller, 1984: 237).

Figure 5 A football team posing for the child photographer 'Terje',
a 10-year-old

After school, when children arrive at the centre or club, they usually go inside the building and have their names ticked on a register (although there is less social control here and it is differently expressed than it is at school). After checking in, many children prefer to be outside. I have select-ed the following photograph, taken by 10-year-old Terje, because it depicts the youth recreation centre as a specialized place for children, in this case a place for playing football (Figure 5). The majority of Danish boys (and some girls too) spend quite a lot of time playing ball during the week. Other pho-tographs from this research (reproduced in Rasmussen and Smidt, 2002) show a wooden hut built by the children and a big earth hill called 'the mountains'. It cannot be judged from the motif or the context as to whether this place is in an institution or in another more freely accessible place in the neighbourhood. This article focuses on a photograph of a more typical situa-tion – the football field.

Terje does not tell me very much about his photograph: 'That's where they are out playing football.' Terje says that he does not always join in and that he does not play every day, although matches are played quite often. Boys play for a while, then they get tired, and take a break. Terje took the picture, probably because he likes to play football, even though he does not seem passionate about the game. This youth recreation centre offers children several specialized places including a music room where Terje also spends some of his 'free time'. Even so, he does not think that he does much at the centre. This may be because children of his age distance themselves from recreational institutions and the specialized places in them (like the ball

court). That may happen because Terje, like many other children, feels too fenced in; or it may not be possible for children of this age to create in institutional settings the kinds of children's places they need.

Conclusion

Children's everyday life in the Scandinavian welfare states, especially in Denmark, has become institutionalized to a high degree during the past three decades. As a consequence, the social structure of childhood has changed, as has the everyday life of Danish children. At the dawn of a new century, the everyday life of a child sits within the institutionalized triangle that I have described in this article. As I have argued, the corners of the triangle are defined by settings that have been designed by adults as 'places for children'. I have also shown that even if 'places for children' are designed for children, child informants easily guide adults to the many contradictions and restrictions within these places and arenas of play and learning.

We have visited large outdoor arenas for children in the institutionalized triangle, looking closely at selected places that are important to children. By now, there should be no doubt that children attribute meaning to the 'places for children' that they find in the 'corners' of the institutionalized triangle – think of the courtyard, the garden, the school playground. There should also be no doubt that children themselves create places, which may be found in official 'places for children' – the tree in the courtyard – and also outside these, like the 'Bumleby'. The many meanings and kinds of 'children's places' should make us aware of children as social and cultural actors who create places that are physical and symbolic and call attention to 'the interfaces' between adults' understanding of what one can and should do in a place for children and children's understanding of this matter. From the different understandings of place that emerge from this analysis, one could ask if adults become less tolerant and accepting vis-a-vis children's places as they encapsulate and design places for children? At the same time, the concept of place should not be underestimated in theorizing children's everyday life and the empirical sociology of childhood.

Notes

1.   The two projects – 'Children's Conditions and Well-Being' and 'Urban Development, Urban Integration and Urban Ecology' – were supported with generous grants from the Danish Research Councils of the Humanities and the Social Sciences. Both projects sit within a larger programme, 'Childhood and Welfare Society', headed by Professor Jens Qvortrup. The second project, which was coordinated by landscape architect Gertrud Jørgensen, focused on children's everyday life in neighbourhoods with different architectural features: (1) blocks of flats with closed courtyards typical of older urban areas built around 1900; (2) blocks of flats (four floors) with an open structure and common green lawns between the blocks, typically built in the 1950s; (3) single-family houses from the 1950s and 1960s with private gardens and narrow

roads; (4) more contemporary neighbourhoods built around 1980 with low density houses, clustered around large green common areas surrounded by trees and bushes, and smaller, interspersed playgrounds. Søren Smidt took part in the collection of empirical material for both projects. Trine Agervig Carstensen, a doctoral student, and Jill Sindholdt, a student, took part in collecting empirical material for the second project.

2.   This and the following photographs are from the research project titled 'Børns institutionaliserede barndom og hverdagsliv' [Children's Institutionalised Childhood and Everyday Life] (see Rasmussen and Smidt, 2003 for methodology and results). The method of interviewing with photographs is spoken of a little differently in the literature on the subject. Anthropologists John Collier and Malcolm Collier write about 'interviewing with photographs' (Collier and Collier, 1986), child researcher Cindy Dell Clark talks of 'the auto-driven interview' (Dell Clark, 1999), while sociologist Douglas Harper speaks of 'photo-elicitation' (Harper, 1983). Harper has briefly described it as follows: 'In the photo-elicitations interview, the informant and the interviewer discuss photographs the researcher has made of the setting, giving the interview a concrete point of reference. A phenomenological sense is gained as the informant explains what the objects in the photograph mean, where they have come from, and what may be missing' (Harper, 1983: 20). If one disregards the fact that others than the researcher, for example children, can have taken the photographs on which the interview is based, this definition seems quite precise with respect to photo-elicitation. The fact that the method has won respect and shown its utility value in, inter alia, urban geographical and urban sociological studies where an attempt is made to actively involve children can be seen, inter alia, from several studies (Buss, 1995; Chawla, 2002; Chawla and Malone, 2003; Driskell, 2002).

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